

EMPATHIC SADISM

How Readers Get Implicated

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A good book draws you in, makes you feel involved in the story, makes you care about the characters. It's a sign of a successful story when the struggles of the characters affect you—but do readers always feel the same emotions as the characters they are reading about? Of course not.

For one thing, readers often know more or less than characters. They see the danger lurking while the character is still perfectly happy, or they are in the dark about a character's happy thoughts. Readers will react to the behavior of the character. For instance, when a character makes a morally suspect move, a reader may say: "Oh no, don't do that!" and feel anger toward the character.¹ Readers also may side with one particular character, making them less likely to share the emotions of another. These examples show that we are entering a complex field of possibilities when dealing with reader emotions and empathy.²

Some scholars may simply shrug and leave reader emotions outside of their investigation, but this is not a possibility for me. For me, narrative is not simply a textual phenomenon, but takes place in the mind of the reader. Hence, I need to face the question of how affective reader reactions come about.

This chapter focuses on one specific aspect of the discrepancy between character emotion and reader emotion, namely the happiness that readers can derive from the suffering of characters (as well as real people). To be more precise, the chapter will examine cases where the positive emotions of the reader are derived from experiencing empathy with a suffering character. We will call this form of empathy "empathic sadism." The examples listed above, however, would not usually fall into this category; although they may invoke sympathy for a character, that is, wishing the character well without necessarily understanding his or her emotions, they do not involve empathy.³

The premise of this chapter may thus sound paradoxical: because readers empathize with a character who is suffering, they can feel good themselves. Maybe it is a paradox, but it is one that can be explained, as evident in the following example. Families of victims of violent crime in the United States often wish to witness the execution of the

criminal. The satisfaction they feel watching the execution, even as it seems that they want to see and feel the pain of the perpetrator,⁴ could be regarded as a form of empathic sadism. It seems reasonable that “feeling the pain” of the offender helps them to feel the sweetness of revenge. We will consider later how these sweet feelings may also arise in cases where the suffering person deserves our support.

On a general level, this chapter contends that the paradoxical emotions involved in empathic sadism are not rare for readers of literary texts, and are moreover a key motivation for reading many literary texts, including certain canonical ones. More specific to the context of narratology, the chapter argues for a differentiation between the implied reader and an implication of the reader in the process of reading. The implied reader is a location in the narratological model of the text: the set assumptions the text (or the author) makes about who will be reading it, and how readers will or should evaluate it. But what I am calling the implicated reader is stronger: a reader whose involvement in the text draws him or her into the moral constellation of the text, perhaps even making the reader somehow guilty for the suffering of a character. I begin by first classifying different phenomena of empathic sadism, before moving to literary works and considering two examples of late nineteenth-century fiction, namely *La Regenta* by Leopoldo Alas, alias Clarín (1884/85) and *Effi Briest* by Theodor Fontane (1896).

Empathic Sadism or Empathy for Empathy's Sake

In his influential essay “These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena,” Daniel C. Batson catalogs what various thinkers and various scholars have called empathy.⁵ Curiously, these definitions indicate that empathy is not always focused on the object of empathy, the empathizee, but rather on its subject, the empathizer. In fact, Batson notes that the original meaning of empathy, coined in English by Titchener in 1909 as the translation of Theodor Lipps's German word *Einfühlung*, is an observer-/empathizer-focused process. Accordingly, he defines this form of empathy as “the process whereby a person imagines what it would be like to be some specific person or some inanimate object, such as a gnarled, dead tree on a windswept hillside.”⁶ Obviously the tree in this example has little to gain from the empathizer, even if it were not already dead. In fact, such exercises of the imagination could encourage

aestheticists to cultivate gnarly trees growing in forbidding environments.

Well, a tree is a tree, but most people nowadays would agree that empathy with other people is a key feature of humanity. Feeling like others (Batson, concept 3) and coming to an understanding of what they are feeling or thinking (Batson, concept 1) allows us to be truly social beings. Thus it seems that we have and use empathy for morally good reasons: We help a person drowning in a pool, we often share food (unlike most other primates), we are good at determining the needs of our young, and we can judge not simply what someone did, but with what intentions he or she acted. When we relate to the suffering of others (Batson concepts 7 and 8), we usually aim to eliminate that suffering.

However, the case of the gnarly tree and self-focus inherent in many or all of these concepts may give us pause. When does the observer's interest in the experience of empathy trump the well-being of the empathizee? When does empathy transform into a paradoxical mode of self-focus? Put differently, when does empathy begin to serve only the empathizer, becoming something like empathy for empathy's sake?

In what follows, we will examine the self-focused forms of empathy that risk causing its object misery, or perhaps even desire the suffering of the other. In particular, we will distinguish different phenomena called empathy that involve the suffering of the other. Our emphasis will be on forms related to fiction, but not exclusively so.

Self-Focused Vicarious Empathy

One of the common explanations of why we enjoy fiction is that it expands the horizon of our experiences. While we probably do not have the experience of being an explorer in Africa in the eighteenth century, enduring the hardships of the Napoleonic wars, being a bullied and abused servant in the Victorian age, or rescuing ourselves from an army of zombies, we may still enjoy imagining how it would feel to be in these situations. We are "going for a ride," as Blakey Vermeule characterized this reading experience.⁷ In this process, we share and yet do not share the feelings of the characters. We see and recognize the suffering and dangers of the characters, but we are still able to enjoy them because they involve excitement, change, and resolution. Here, the well-being of the other (the character) may be something we wish for, but only in the long run. Before the

level of long-term happiness is reached, we need the character to go through these hardships like the gnarly tree. Oh, did it die? What a pity!

It is obvious that this concept is widely applicable to the reading of fiction and might in fact be most common there. Readers participate vicariously in characters and their situations, without having to fear that the fictional characters will turn around and ask them for money.⁸ Participation is especially enhanced when there are changes, developments, and solutions expected in temporal sequences.

Predictive, Self-Empowering Empathy or Sadistic Empathy

Instead of simply going along for a ride with another person (or character), we might also setting the other person up for that very ride, manipulating their situation in order to enjoy our own correct predictions of his or her emotions and states. These manipulations make it easier for the observer to anticipate the affective and other cognitive results in the other. Sadistic or predictive empathy is a manipulation of another that allows one to predict or anticipate the others feelings in order to more easily simulate or understand him or her. Such empathy is pleasurable regardless of whether or not we “care” for the other and wish him or her well. Sadistic or predictive empathy ranges from knowing that the other will have an emotional reaction to a precise estimation or simulation to predicting exactly what he or she will feel. The emphasis here is on what one could call a self-affirming effect. Three real-life practices in particular come to mind:

Retributive pain empathy. When punishing someone else, we desire the pain of the other. To be sure, the punishers vicarious feeling of the others pain is not necessarily part of all punishments. We may understand punishing a child as an act of education, for instance. In many cases, however, the punisher may want to feel the other’s pain as a way of getting back at him or her. Even our seemingly modern penal code of law seems to acknowledge the desire to get even, as evident in the fact that family members who wish to watch the perpetrators be killed are often allowed to do so. Knowing that someone finds “justice” behind bars, on the gallows, or by being singled out in court may still carry the emotional knowledge of the criminal’s pain, and even simulate it in some instances. The satisfaction of seeing justice served may result from a transformation of other-focused empathy into self-gratification.⁹

Sadism. Many human acts can be labeled sadistic, even when leaving the question of psychopathy out of this discussion. Sadists enjoy inflicting pain on others or watching the pain of others. Now, where does this enjoyment come from? Even if a sadist's attitude is to say: "Your pain does not move me," he or she will still seem to have desired this very pain, perhaps simply to assert his superiority over the other. Or perhaps this sense of superiority depends on feeling that very pain and thus being able to say with certainty: "I can cause these feelings in you!"

Manipulative predictive empathy. Sadism, as we just characterized it, is certainly not an attractive form of empathy. Yet I would like to suggest that a small dose of empathetic sadism is part of everyday behavior. There are multiple forms of negative behavior that may be undertaken for the sake of enabling empathy. When one criticizes someone else, it can be to correct bad behavior, or to get even with this person. It can also be to make the other feel bad in a predictable way, which allows the criticizer to "tune in" to his or her emotions. In general, many manipulations can bring about and intensify those situations and scenarios that allow one to predict, know, and feel someone else's emotions. Examples of acts that facilitate the prediction of another person's feelings include embarrassing, shaming, teasing, disappointing, testing, moralizing, mistreatment of subordinates in the workplace, sexual domination, playing devil's advocate in moral situations, and so on, often in quite subtle or ironic forms. This predictive quality can also include positive feelings, ranging from the joy of giving a gift and anticipating the reaction of the receiver, to learning situations, where the observer is happy about an insight of the learner.

Of course, readers of fiction do not usually manipulate actual texts (leaving digital fiction aside). They are however, constantly entertaining expectations of what will, might, or should happen in a given situation. What is more, it seems likely—though I would not even begin trying to prove this—that without expectations, predictions, and preferences in the reader's mind, narrative fiction would be impossible.¹⁰ The correctness of these expectations matters. Some of the most significant moments in my personal reading experience have come when what I expected or wanted to happen did not. These expectations can come in various forms: suspense,¹¹ predictions, preferences,¹² or suspicion. It can be noted that already Aristotle built his theory of poetics on the central

notion of a temporal development toward a catharsis. According to his theory, the cathartic moment is the moment of a “forking” whereby the logical expectations of a character split from the actual events driven by another logical development.¹³ Even what seems to be a possible exception, namely the dead, gnarly tree, might fit in here. In that case, to empathize might mean to understand the past forces that have made the tree into what it is now.

Empathic or “Sadistic Benefactor”

A related but distinct pleasure in the negative emotions of the other has recently been identified by Lisa Zunshine as the “sadistic benefactor.” A sadistic benefactor wants to “force others into revealing their feelings through body language.”¹⁴ This would seem to correspond with the predictive, self-empowering empathy described above. However, Zunshine adds a twist by giving a positive bend to the motivation of the empathizer. Ultimately, these empathizers intend to do good. They force others into a state of misery or suffering, only to then uplift them into a state of happiness made even more intense by the prior misery. It is not clear in retrospect whether the prior negative feelings of the empathizee served the sadistic pleasures of the empathizer and the final positive twist is only a cover-up, or whether the prior negative feelings served to heighten the happiness of the character even more. (Zunshine’s examples, such as Sarah Fielding’s Lord Dorchester or Rousseau’s Jean-Jacques as educator of Emile either leave this question open or lean toward the latter). Hence, in contrast to the predictive, self-empowering empathy, the sadistic benefactor ultimately focuses on the extreme turn of emotions of the other from bad to good. And in contrast to the self-focused vicarious empathy, the sadistic benefactor already knows and predicts the positive feeling of the empathizee (the victim).

So far, our examples have concerned the plot of stories and our sadistic benefactors have been characters, such as Jean-Jacques. But we may also ask whether the attitude of a sadistic benefactor may also be present in the reader-character relation, or reader’s contract. I believe that it is. I suspect that this attitude can represent the reader’s emotional side in what has been called the “trial narrative,” one of the two kinds of basic plots for fiction distinguished by Vivasvan Soni (the other being the tragic plot).¹⁵ In the trial

narrative, a hero is put to a test and must suffer greatly for the sake of the ultimate reward. Examples for this story type are the temptation of Jesus in the desert, most bildungsromans, and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740). Why do readers enjoy these trial narratives? One part of the answer may be that the reader is a kind of empathic or sadistic benefactor: because we expect that the trial may be for the ultimate good, we like to feel more suffering and misery.

Advocative Exploitative Empathy

It is certainly a good thing to have sympathy for and empathy with someone who is suffering. Even better is to be the sufferer's advocate, the voice of the voiceless. Be that as it may, it is fair to ask what the mental rewards for the advocate are. The knowledge of doing good can be one. However, there may also be a more complicated emotional mechanism at work. Similar to the sadistic benefactor, the advocative exploitative empathizer (or: the empathic exploitative advocate) may use his or her morally good advocacy to cover up some empathic reveling in the pain of others.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and his *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady* (1748) famously single out innocent suffering characters. What is "attractive" for the reader about these suffering women is probably neither simply the predictive quality of understanding the misery of the suffering character, nor simply the feeling of wishing for a good end (as in the empathic or sadistic benefactor), though both are likely to come into play. Rather, the specific mechanism here might be the observed misery that awakens and arouses the reader to decry the injustice or cruelty.

Turning the reader into an advocate has an obvious and good moral effect when the reader takes the correct side in a conflict and stands up for the innocent suffering character. However, turning the reader into an advocate may also make the advocate-reader dependent on the very misfortune or injustice. The reader can only fashion him- or herself into an advocate so long as the injustice and suffering continue. As a consequence, a perverse duality is at work: the reader wishes for the good but simultaneously wishes to prolong the suffering.¹⁶ (This dynamic will be further developed below.)

These four forms of empathy all share the self-focus of the empathizer. These forms

of sadistic empathy can all be termed empathy for empathy's sake in analogy to art-for-art's-sake, a means of stressing that this empathy does not directly benefit its object. On the lower levels of the pyramid, the empathizer merely tracks the states of the empathizee ("going for a ride"). On the higher levels, suffering of the empathizee becomes a source of enjoyment for the empathizer (see figure 21.1).

To be sure, this list is not complete and among other things does not consider psychoanalytic categories or aesthetic feelings, such as the sublime, that may include empathy. The list nevertheless provides a good starting point for discussing the dark sides of reader empathy, for it allows us to pinpoint the odd state of reader involvement that goes beyond "going for a ride" and mere prediction to deriving pleasure from actual manipulation (as sadistic benefactor) or advocacy. This is what we will discuss in the following. In particular, we will ask how readers can get drawn into texts and get "implicated."

Figure 21.1 Degrees of sadistic empathy

La Regenta and Sadistic Empathy

In the previous section, we discussed how the observation of a characters suffering might be desirable for a reader.¹⁷ In the following, we will look into a striking literary technique that draws readers into a specific form of sadistic empathy. To that end, we will examine the portrayal of adultery in two works of late nineteenth-century fiction, namely *La Regenta* (1884/85) by Leopoldo Alas, alias Clarín, and Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1896). These works stem from a lineage of adultery texts that prominently include Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1809) and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856). Both are representative of the historical period of realism, whose strategic focus on depicting the intricate minutiae of everyday life allows and denies insights into the characters. That being said, the strategies we will examine can be found in other periods as well. For the present purpose, I do not presuppose prior knowledge of these novels.

It is perhaps no wonder that *La Regenta* has only in recent decades achieved the fame it deserves.¹⁸ Not only does the novel address the scandalous topic of adultery,

and paint a scathing portrait of its setting, the Spanish city of Oviedo, but it also places an unreasonable demand on the reader: It gives us no positive or even compelling figure to identify with.

The novel portrays a nearly hopeless situation. Donna Ana Ozores, the Regenta and wife of a retired judge, is the “pearl” of the provincial capital “Vetustas,” a fictional Oviedo.¹⁹ She is the “most beautiful woman in the city” and a most desirable prize for both the leading priest, the ambitious canon Don Fermin de Pas, and the local Don Juan-like womanizer and leader of the progressive party, Don Alvaro. Prior to the action of the novel, Ana Ozores has led a life unfulfilled in every way. Her parents died young, her education left her isolated, and her husband, a harmless eccentric, is an old and impotent but mostly well-meaning man completely devoid of any passion for his wife. She has every reason to want a change in circumstances. She has no children, and because of her husband's impotence (or closeted homosexuality) she has little cause for hope. Over the course of many hundred pages the novel describes the tug of war between Don Fermin and Don Alvaro as the two men vie for Donna Ana. Don Fermin des Pas offers Donna Ana spiritual awakening, while Don Alvaro offers bodily, erotic fulfillment, but each does so for his own selfish aims. The tides of war keep turning. At first one will have the upper hand, then the other. Both are counting on a victory. Two unknown voices summarize this struggle as follows:

“But which one is going to get the cat to wet its feet?”

“What cat?”

“Its feet or her feet?”

“The canon theologian.”

“Alvaro.”

“Or both of them.”

“Or neither.”²⁰

It is this conflict between the suitors, rather than the psychological nuance, social criticism, and analysis of gender roles, that brings the novel to life. Without this suspense, the novel would not exist. Readers of the novel will most likely ask themselves what will happen (probability) and what ought to happen (preference) to Ana.²¹

In the course of the novel, something strange occurs. In observing how Don Fermin

and Don Alvaro launch their “attacks” on Ana, the reader figures out the self-interested game the men are playing. During each of their respective “assaults” on Ana, the reader will be unlikely to side with the aggressor, be it Fermin or Alvaro. Although the narratives are usually told from the perspective of the two men, especially Fermin, the implied preference is against the male attacker. Of course that doesn’t mean readers could not root for the aggressor, but because the narration is interspersed with reminders of the selfishness of the two men, it seems likely that most readers will root against them. So far, this side-taking is not strange at all.

In order to describe this preference, it makes sense to speak of the implied reader (or authorial audience), who develops a moral preference for Ana. The implied reader is, in a classic definition by Wayne Booth, “the reader who the implied author writes to.”²² This definition involves knowledge, since the implied reader needs to have a degree of historical and cultural understanding in order to make sense of the text.²³ This knowledge component is sometimes described as a contextual anchoring of a narrative text.²⁴ Yet narratologists such as James Phelan have taken the concept of the implied reader farther, suggesting that the implied reader also evaluates the characters and events emotionally as well as ethically. This evaluative function of the implied reader comes into play especially in cases of unreliable narrators; that is to say, when it appears that the narrator cannot be trusted. In these instances, the implied readers “reject those words [by the narrator] and, if possible, reconstruct a more satisfactory account... or... accept what the narrator says but then supplement the account.”²⁵ This account echoes the earlier definition of the implied reader as formulated in 1972 by Wolfgang Iser, who proposed that the task of the implied reader is to bring unconnected narrative elements, such as narrative voice, perspective, or plot elements, into a relationship with each other when the text fails to provide clear connection or evaluation.²⁶

This function of the implied reader may at first seem sufficient to explain what happens here. However, as we will shortly see, the concept of the implied reader cannot fully explain what happens with actual audiences and readers of these texts. In a step-by-step discussion first of *La Regenta* then of *Effi Briest*, we will trace how these novels bring the implied reader into a paradoxical situation with moral implications. To be sure, the concept of the implied reader seems well suited to describe the readers’ reservations

regarding Fermín and Alvaro.

On the one hand, the Catholic Fermín de Pas wants to make Donna Ana into his “slave.” This would increase his influence in the city since Ana, the “pearl of the city,” has such a symbolically elevated status.²⁷ And indeed, his stock in the city moves up when Ana Ozores prominently participates in a Catholic ritual, proceeding through the city barefoot in the Easter parade. In addition, he has, without quite admitting it, fallen in love with Ana. Unfortunately for Fermín, becoming the lover of a Catholic priest is simply not an option for Ana. To this we should perhaps add that Fermín is not only a manipulative, predictive empathizer who reads and controls people around him for selfish purposes, but as we learn later in the novel, also already has and mistreats a mistress.²⁸

On the other hand, a victory for the seducer Alvaro doesn't have much to offer Ana either. Don Alvaro is a consummate trophy-hunting ladies' man. He wants to win Ana and enjoy her for the simple reason that he has always gotten what he wanted, and wants to convince himself that he will be able to keep getting what he wants even as he grows older. He does not care that the stigma of adultery would destroy her. At first he refrains from physical intimacies, but only strategically, because he knows that he could lose her if he is too aggressive. Instead he strikes up a friendship with her husband, deploys his friends as spies to get closer to her, and feigns tears in his false confession of love.

Given this setup of the novel, one might think that readers would lean toward identifying with Donna Ana or at least side with her empathetically. And certainly, this is what we could expect in most works of fiction since the eighteenth century, such as in the aforementioned novels of Samuel Richardson. The case of *La Regenta*, however, is different. It is different because empathizing with Ana would mean accepting and taking on the gamut of her unattractive qualities: her blindness and naivete, her religious sentimentality, her arrogance, and her self-deceit. For example, she is dishonest to herself when she indulges in a spiritual love with Alvaro,²⁹ she has easily exploitable prejudices,³⁰ and she pities herself and glorifies her life as “martyrdom” simply because her husband is a bit grumpy.³¹ Still, fiction is full of cases where readers identify gladly with naive or self-deceiving characters, ranging from Don Quixote to Jane Austen's characters.

The difficulty here is that Ana has no goal, not even an implied one. Without a trajectory, it is hard to empathize with her. In the first section of this chapter, we suggested that reader empathy is usually connected with the expectation of change, development, and solutions. Without such future expectation, projection, or development, and without a mind that focuses on her own interest and intention, Ana Ozores is sealed off from most forms of empathy from the reader. As a result, it is hard to care for her. It is much easier to relate to someone with a trajectory, outlook, or goal, even if it is an evil one, as in slasher movies³² or in a film like *Silence of the Lambs*,³³ than with someone who has none, such as Ana. This lack of goal-driven behavior, a state almost without dreams, seems to rob Ana of an identity. Of course, this does not mean that actual readers have not identified with her. Those readers who do identify or empathize with Ana, though, probably do not affirm the hopelessness of her situation, but either invent fantastic new paths for her or are forced to ignore parts of the novel. As much as most readers may want the best for her, it is nevertheless difficult to see things from her point of view for long enough to develop empathy since there is nothing to see in her future. Ana's unavailability for reader empathy is also stressed in her distance from the narrator, who even scolds her a few times.³⁴

To be clear, the majority of readers as well as the implied reader will in most places be morally on Ana's side, due in no small part to her innocence, her status as a victim, and her complete lack of malevolence. At the same time, it seems more precise to say that readers are not so much directly siding with her, as they are morally siding against her attackers. After all, she is the victim of the intrigues of these two men as well as others. This rooting against her attackers, however, does not transform into a lasting perspective-taking and full empathy. Actual readers may find themselves in an odd position; on the one hand, they adopt the perspective of the implied reader (who is against the attackers and thus is morally for Ana), while also taking the perspective of and perhaps even identifying with her attackers for short periods of time (for they at least have ambitions for the future). If we recall the cathartic moment of "forking" described by Aristotle, Clarins novel would appear to offer a "fork" between reader preference (or sympathy) by the implied reader and perspective-taking (a step toward full empathy).

What effect does this "fork" have in this novel? Again, Clarins narrative invites

readers to take the cognitive and affective perspective of many characters, mostly of the goal-driven Fermin, but also Alvaro and many minor characters such as Obdulia, Visita, Petra, and so on, without however siding with them. Still, the implied readers preference for Ana, the innocent, naive victim, creates a conflict. Transforming the perspective-taking with the attackers into a lasting identification and full empathy would in effect affirm their selfish aims and the destruction of Ana. As we well know, these attackers are no heroes, and when Ana resists, both male protagonists try to punish her for her hesitation.³⁵ Nevertheless, the slope from focalization to perspective-taking and identification is slippery.

The tension between the implied reader and perspective-taking does not lead to a clear solution, despite our assumption that actual readers want to empathize with someone. But because the subtleties of the novel rule out every possible candidate (the only good person appears as a mere witness on the last pages of the thousand-page novel), there is no strong narrator to identify with and no clear implied author other than perhaps a sarcastic puppeteer who mostly remains in the background. In the end, neither perspective-taking nor the implied reader leads to full empathy.

More than the others, Ana resists attempts at identification or full empathy. As things stand in her current state (mentally, spiritually, psychologically, physically, sexually, etc.), she is unbalanced and unsatisfied. The novel repeatedly describes her hang-ups through metaphors involving the blocked circulation of fluids.³⁶ Ana never does what the well-wishing implied reader hopes she will, even though she does possess a certain, albeit limited, room for maneuvering. Yet for hundreds of pages Ana takes no action.

What happens, then, to the reader looking to empathize when there is no one left to identify with? If literature were created for the simple game of identifying with characters, for experiencing their emotions, sharing their perspective and, in essence, caring for them, then one would have to conclude that this novel is not very successful, because it does not allow perspective-taking beyond the duration of single episodes. It is always temporary and always with the wrong person. Nevertheless, the reader remains active and actively searching for an orienting point of view.

Here I would like to suggest that readers become creative and invent a position for empathy when there is no point of view that the reader can simply morally adopt. Instead

of simply choosing from the existing characters, the reader becomes productive. This productivity takes the form of inventing possibilities and positions that are not present in the text, but which ought to exist. The creative potential inherent in side-taking comes to light in Clarín's creative and experimental setup, which goes significantly farther than its grand predecessor, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

What does the reader who supports Ana make of her inactivity and resistance? One possibility is that such a well-meaning reader succumbs to frustration with Ana for not cooperating with what he or she imagines will save her. This leaves one option: In order to be saved, Ana must fall, must be sacrificed. Thus the reader is put in a position similar to that of her pursuers, whose attraction transforms directly into fantasies of punishment. Even her so-called friend Visita enjoys "the pleasure of seeing her friend fall where she herself had fallen."³⁷ Neither the preferences of the implied reader nor perspective-taking give the novel its form. Rather, something outside the narrator's and perhaps even the authors control occurs. In order to have empathy with Ana, it is necessary to force her into a predictable pattern of affects, which in this case seems to be possible only in a negative, violent way.

The paradox of the novel lies in the reader's alignment with Ana, an alignment that for some readers will lead them to identify with her attackers: those characters intent on criticizing her (Fermin, Petra, Visita) or taking advantage of her (Alvaro). In this three-person scenario (Ana, attacker, and reader), the reader's preference for Ana may be transformed into an alignment with those characters whose actions will do her harm, because these very actions enable readers to predict Ana's misery and thus finally facilitate reader empathy with her. In other words, we may adopt the attacker's desire to destroy Ana in order to empathize with her, and this desire for empathy transforms into empathetic sadism. The very lack of a future for Ana, which served as to block empathy, now gives way to an acceptance of a dark future, but one that allows for change and predictive sadistic empathy.

(Following the pattern of degrees of sadistic empathy above, we note that no figure of a sadistic benefactor is visible, at least not in the plot. This might present an opportunity for readers to engage with the text as sadistic benefactors, thinking that Ana's suffering and fall could eventually lead to a better future, even though the novel does little to

support this vague hope. Likewise, the impulse of reader advocacy for Ana seems too limited. Certainly, the impulse to side against her attackers will turn many readers into advocates for her. Ultimately however, her social position as well as her naive arrogance may prove too strong for her to be a good candidate for long-term side-taking.)

This hypothetical reaction of readers to desire Ana's suffering goes beyond what the concept of implied reader suggests. But how shall we then describe it? Before we jump to conclusions, I would like to point to a second related case.

Effi Briest and the Implication of the Reader

The ensuing argument will be conducted through a reading of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*, in order to further elaborate on the mechanism outlined above, the three-person alignment without identification.³⁸ Though like *La Regenta*, *Effi Briest* constitutes another reaction to *Madame Bovary*, it is unlikely that Fontane was aware of Clarin's novel. What is remarkable about the figure of Effi Briest is how much we know about her compared to how little information we gather directly from her and her inner states—much less than from *Emma Bovary* or *Ana Ozores*. Indeed, the other characters in the novel regularly speculate and make assumptions about the real Effi, how she feels, and what she is really like. Whether from her mother, her older husband Innstetten, or her lover Crampas, these assumptions are not harmless speculation, but convey in a more or less subtle manner how these people expect Effi to act. The speech Effi's mother gives her early in the novel, when Effi asks her advice about Innstettens marriage proposal, is as telling as it is disastrous:

It's not the kind of thing to be joked about. You saw him the day before yesterday, and I think you liked him. Of course, he is older than you, which is a good thing all in all, and he is a man of character, position and sound morality, and if you don't say no, which I would hardly expect from my clever Effi, then at twenty you'll have a position others don't reach until they're forty. You'll go far further than your mamma.³⁹

The mother's speech seems to usurp her daughter's free choice, and yet right away she claims to understand her daughter. This belief comes across in the suggestive parenthetical phrase, "which I would hardly expect from my clever Effi." The statement preempts Effi's choice, so that the image of the free Effi appears only as a phantom

against the backdrop of her usurped freedoms of choice and love. We do not see who Effi is, what she desires, or what she thinks—we only see how her own choices are withheld from her. Her mother's manipulation keeps Effi from putting her own feet on the ground, and instead lodges them firmly on her mother's own path: "You'll go far further than your mamma." And we should not be surprised to discover that Effi's future husband is in fact her mother's former lover. Her mother identifies with her daughter in such a way as to strip Effi of her free will. This is an illustrative scene in a novel where identification only figures as the violent act of stealing an identity. Whoever identifies with someone else forces that person into conformity with him- or herself.

Michel Foucault would have called such identificatory assumptions about Effi "discourses"; they try to dominate their object (Effi) through their language such that she only takes shape as a dominated figure under the control of the discourse. Rather than reveal who Effi is or what she wants, the novel only conveys what others think about her. Particularly telling are those moments in the novel when others aim to control Effi's actions by means of their "discourse." These discourses often take the form of narratives, such as the tale of the Chinese servant, a ghost story Effi's husband concocts to confine her to the home. Or they materialize as a form of assigning an identity to her—like that of a "little lamb, white as snow" at the same time that evidence of her affair is piling up.

One can easily imagine that Effi is trying to hide something significant, namely her affair. Yet this is not quite correct; it is not that Effi necessarily wants to hide something, she simply never manages to express herself. In addition, the affair seems to arise not out of a true desire, but of desperation or boredom.⁴⁰ Effi tries to tell her parents that she has changed, but they ignore or misunderstand her. Her mother, her husband Innstetten, her cousin, and so many others fail to consider the possibility that Effi does not conform to their idea of her and as a result, never acknowledge the power their assumptions have over her. At the very end of the novel, her parents finally do go so far as to admit that they might possibly have made a mistake in choosing Effi's course in life. However, we do not learn whether they think that they might have misunderstood her. The distanced narrative voice offers no assistance to our heroine either, working instead to expose the discrepancy between what people assume about Effi and in what ways she might have

been different. Exactly how she might have been different, if she was, is left unknown, and even her affair is just a clichéd escapade.

Effi is, presumably, not what people think she is. But what she actually is, is not revealed. This may well be the key difference between Theodor Fontane's novel and *Clarins*: Ana may in reality be as empty as she fears,⁴¹ while Effi is an "empty space," for the other characters as well as the readers who do not have insight into her thoughts (even the affair is only reported years afterwards when the love letters emerge). Still the novel keeps pointing to the possibility that she is being misunderstood, and this misperception is tantamount to an act of violence against her. Effi shares this alienation or strangeness with the spectral Chinese servant, another character with a mysterious "nonpresence" in the novel.⁴²

Because no one in the novel takes the side of Effi (whom we only know in the distorted images of others), there is a call for someone to do what no one else does. Enter the reader. At first it seems that the concept of the implied reader (the authorial audience) is sufficient to capture the preference most readers will feel. In the case of this novel, the implied reader will likely be on Effi's side and against that of her oppressors. The implied reader is a marker of dissonance, marking that which no one names but which should happen. In this sense, the implied reader is an archivist of discrepancy between what is and what could be. Since the reader is the only one pointing to the injustice and the necessity of noting it, he or she is drawn into the text and gains a presence in the novel as if he or she were a character. This needs some explanation.

On some basic level, the implied reader's tasks in *Effi Briest* and *La Regenta* are similar: to mentally defend the female heroine against attackers and assumptions (controlling discourses) about her.⁴³ This task can develop into advocacy, though as noted above, this impulse is more limited in *La Regenta*. Advocacy (from *ad-vocare*) in these novels means first of all to articulate the speech that the characters do not utter, either because they do not speak (Effi) or say the wrong things (Ana). Since Effi herself seems to only partially understand the violence being done to her and does not speak about it, and since it is unknown whether or how she registers that violence, it is up to the reader "to jump in," that is, to be the *deus ex machina* and to act instead of her and on behalf of her. The reader takes note of the injustices Effi suffers, and by marking the discrepancy,

becomes a presence. In short, the reader becomes implicated.

The best evidence for this effect may be Rainer Werner Fassbinders famous movie adaption *Effi Briest* (1974) in which he has Effi give an inflammatory speech exposing all the wrongs of the society. It is a speech Fontanes Effi could never have given, but one that the implicated reader would very much wish to give. And does give in my opinion, for I would suggest that it is in fact the implicated reader who speaks through Effi in this movie.

This involvement of the reader due to a lack of a proper voice from the maligned protagonist has two seemingly contradictory effects: on the one hand, the reader sides with the oppressed, misunderstood, and mistreated character by preserving the knowledge of her suffering, even if such a character as Effi does not recognize the suffering herself. In fact, the readers preference becomes so strong that the reader may feel as if he or she were just as much a part of the novel as in Fassbinder s movie, and thus can intervene on Effi's behalf; seeing the world through her eyes, actually feeling her suffering, the reader advocates on her behalf and takes action for her.

On the other hand, the force that drives the reader into the story as if he or she were a character can produce the effect that this reader develops the self-interest to preserve his or her presence in the novel. That is to say, for the reader to be quasi-present in the novel as an advocate, that reader must also affirm the suppression of the female protagonist. Without such a scene of suppression or violent misunderstanding, the reader would not intervene in the story, because there would be no reason for doing so. And this is the other, apparently contradictory effect: the affirmation and reduplication of the very misunderstanding that makes the involvement of the reader possible.

I refer to this effect as the "implication of the reader" or the "implicated reader," a wholly different entity than the implied reader. The implied reader (authorial audience) sides firmly against the attackers and is for the heroine, as was the case in both of the novels we discussed. In contrast, the implicated reader is involved to such a degree that he or she develops choices that are serving himself or herself first and are not directly prefigured by the author. In the case of *La Regenta*, the reader gets implicated in the moment he or she wishes for one of the attackers to succeed for the reason that this would allow for a prediction of Ana's suffering (and thus reader empathy). In the case of

Effi Briest, the reader gets implicated once the preference for the heroine causes the reader to accept and require her suppression. In effect, the implicated reader begins to act and behave like an independent character.

In Effi Briest, the implicated reader must “want” a character to be misunderstood, since only this allows the reader to make the leap, to be involved and enter the text. Only thanks to this unjust misunderstanding does the implicated reader come into existence. In other words, the reader must want the female protagonist (or the child, the underdog, etc.) to be misunderstood and mistreated, since the readers involvement and existence depend on it. Here empathy (and side-taking) is perverted into a form of advocative, exploitative empathy such as was described in the first section of this chapter.

This regression of the morally superior witness into the role of punisher experiencing either predictive, sadistic empathy (Clarín) or advocative, exploitative empathy (Fontane) is less a psychological tendency in actual readers than a structural effect of the implicated reader as third party.⁴⁴ The reader must seek to prolong that which enables his or her emotional involvement. Without it, he or she would not be implicated and thus not exist. The process of implication has three parts:

1. Recognition of injustice (discrepancy between what is and should be)
2. The wish to set things straight, or for compensation (involvement)
3. Desire for a scene of violence (oppression) that calls the reader into action

This implication of the reader also has an effect for the protagonist as well. For example, Effi remains herself only because she cannot take on her own identity. This means that the scene in which she is misunderstood is constitutive of her identity: she is most true to herself when she is not allowed to be herself. The reader who observes this inability of Effi to be herself feels called upon to act and take Effi’s side. In doing so, the newly implicated reader simultaneously repudiates and affirms her oppression, and through this process experiences both sympathy and hidden pleasure at her suffering.

Precisely because no one can identify with them (and because identification is staged as a form of violent misunderstanding), Ana Ozores and Effi Briest become objects of a perverse and sadistic empathy. The lack of empathy within the novel subsequently forces the reader into a divided, contradictory position. As a result, the reader’s interest in the text becomes more than merely hermeneutic or psychological, it is self-affective: it

is the implication of the reader that brings the reader into being.⁴⁵

Clarín's *La Regenta* and Fontane's *Effi Briest* reveal a technique of implicating the reader via a mechanism that combines an other-focused empathy with a self-focused one. The simultaneity of the recognition of injustice, the criticism of it, and the desire for the punishment or oppression to continue characterizes canonical works of narrative fiction. It builds upon a long English-American tradition of suppressed female protagonists from *Clarissa* and *Pamela* in Samuel Richardson's novels to Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as a continental European tradition ranging from the mysterious Otilie in Goethe's *Elective Affinities* to the ironic treatment *Madame Bovary* receives. This technique is prominent in the period of realism with its "poetics of observation,"⁴⁶ but is not limited to it.

Within the particular context of continental European realism a gender-specific pattern emerges. Like *Madame Bovary*, *La Regenta* and *Effi Briest* stand between the poles of turning a woman completely into an object, as in the works of de Sade, and of putting a woman on a pedestal, as in Sacher-Masoch.⁴⁷ The ways in which Ana and Effi are oppressed demonstrate to the reader that these characters are entitled to full personhood, and yet they only awake the empathy of the reader when that personhood is withheld from them.

La Regenta and *Effi Briest* give us an insight into the complex reader emotions involved in sadistic empathy. The triggering of empathy, at least here, comes at the price of the suffering of another person. Thus our empathy (and sympathy) with another negotiates the extremes of positive involvement on the one hand, and negative sentiments on the other. It is caught in this tension, oscillating between the affirmative experiences of sympathy, advocacy, and side-taking and the destructive desires for dominance, punishment, and exploitation. In these texts, empathy implicates the reader as though he or she were a character within the novel; a character who draws his life blood from the continued suffering of the victim.

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editing and partly translating the chapter. Finally, I owe some formulations to Elizabeth Magill.

Notes

1. In fact, William Flesch has argued that our desire for fair rewards and punishment may be our ultimate interest in fiction. See William Flesch, *Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
2. For some more complex cases of this relation, see also Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, "Transport: Challenges to the Metaphor," chapter 25 in this volume.
3. Douglas Chismar, "Empathy and Sympathy: The Important Difference," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 22 (1988): 257-66.
4. Jody Madeira, *Killing Timothy McVeigh* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
5. Daniel C. Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge: MIT Press), 3-16. For an overview of different aspects of empathy, see also Susanne Leiberg and Silke Anders, "The Multiple Facets of Empathy: A Survey of Theory and Evidence," in *Progress in Brain Research* 156 (2006): 419-40.
6. Batson, "These Things Called Empathy," 6.
7. Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
8. See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28-35
9. Tania Singer and colleagues may have described a case of such transformation. They did an fMRI study in which they had participants watch the physical punishment of cheaters in a game. The fMRI readings showed that female participants showed signified patterns of empathy with the suffering cheater, while the male ones did not. The fMRI readings of the male participants suggest the absence of empathy and the activation of reward instead (if there was an unfair punishment, both males and females showed similar patterns of empathy). Whereas the mechanism behind the male absence of other-focused empathy is unclear, it can be assumed that males

also fully recognized the pain of the cheater, but are either blocking it entirely or transforming it into a different, self-focused affect. See Tania Singer, B. Seymour, J. P. O'Doherty, K. E. Stephan, R. J. Dolan, and C. D. Frith, "Empathic Neural Responses Are Modulated by the Perceived Fairness of Others," *Nature* 439 (2006): 466-69.

10. My personal definition of narrative builds on the assumption that narratives take place in the head of the recipient in a process of considering alternative explanations of events, intentions, and motivations. Narrative thinking involves considering or suspecting alternative versions of what has already happened or will happen. Narrative, in my view, is thus always more than a given sequence of events, but involves different, even contradictory ways to make sense of these very events. To use a famous example: "The King died and then the Queen died" becomes a narrative only when we consider various linkages between both events, including possibilities such as "The King died and then the Queen died, nevertheless." The arguments of this chapter do not rest on these considerations. For a full definition, see Fritz Breithaupt, *Kultur der Ausrede* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012).
11. Donald Beecher, "Suspense." *Philosophy and Literature* 33 (2009): 255-27.
12. David N. Rapp and Richard J. Gerrig, "Predilections for Narrative Outcomes: The Impact of Story Contexts and Reader Preferences," *Journal of Memory and Language* 54 (2006): 54-67.
13. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newbury Port: Focus Publishing, 2006), 33 (1452a).
14. Lisa Zunshine, *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 45-53.
15. Vivasvan Soni, "Trials and Tragedies: The Literature of Unhappiness (A Model for Reading Narratives of Suffering)," *Comparative Literature* 59.2 (2007): 119-39.
16. William Flesch describes certain split emotions in reading as an emotional bargaining. Preferences and compromises are part of the dynamic of reading, with readers "bargaining" for a good outcome and thereby also tolerating (or expecting) some negative emotional results. William Flesch, "Reading and Bargaining," chapter 18 in this volume.

17. An earlier, now fully rewritten version of this section appeared in Spanish in Fritz Breithaupt, *Culturas de la Empatía*, trans. Alejandra Obermeier (Madrid: Katz, 2011).
18. The novel remained largely unknown outside of Spain, in spite of the 1975 film version by Gonzalo Suárez. The first English translation appeared in 1984.
19. Leopoldo Alas, *La Regenta*, trans. John Rutherford (London: Penguin, 2005), 590.
20. Alas, *La Regenta*, 468.
21. See above and Rapp and Gerrig, "Predilections for Narrative Outcomes."
22. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 422.
23. This aspect is stressed by Dan Shen, "Implied Author, Authorial Audience, and Context: Form and History in Neo-Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory," *Narrative* 21.2 (2013): 140-58.
24. For some of the complexities of contextual anchoring, see David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 331-71.
25. James Phelan, *Living To Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 50-51.
26. Wolfgang Iser, *Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett* (Munich: UTB, 1972).
27. Alas, *La Regenta*, 581.
28. Estela Vieira, *The Spatial Poetics of Machado de Assis, Eça de Queirós, and Leopoldo Alas* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 101-60.
29. Alas, *La Regenta*, chapter 16. Likewise, she keeps her love for Alvaro secret from her confessor Fermin, without recognizing this as an outright lie (Alas, *La Regenta*, 392).
30. Alas, *La Regenta*, 634.
31. Alas, *La Regenta*, 438.
32. Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
33. See the chapter by Carl Plantinga in this volume (chapter 14).
34. See, for example: "The spirit of imitation was taking hold of Ana; she did not realize how presumptuous she was being," Alas, *La Regenta*, 474. See also chapter 27.

35. See chapters 18 and 20, as well as Fermin's fantasies of Ana as his "slave" in chapter 26.
36. Gumbrecht observes that the novel can be described along two symbolic axes, namely nature vs. society and sexuality vs. sterility. Each character can be positioned along these axes. Notably in this regard, the combination of sexuality and nature remains unoccupied; see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Lebenswelt als Fiktion / Sprachspiele als Antifiktion. Über Funktionen des realistischen Romans in Frankreich und Spanien," in *Funktionen des Fiktiven (Poetik und Hermeneutik X)*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Wolfgang Iser (Munich: Fink, 1983), 239-75.
37. Alas, *La Regenta*, 355.
38. An earlier, now much revised version of this section appeared in German in Fritz Breithaupt, *Kulturen der Empathie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).
39. Fontane, Theodor. *Effi Briest*, trans. Hugh Rorrison and Helen Chambers (London: Penguin, 2000), 36.
40. Brian Tucker, "Performing Boredom in *Effi Briest*: On the Effects of Narrative Speed," *German Quarterly* 80 (2007): 185-200.
41. Ana thinks "that inside her... was nobody who was she, Ana, essentially, really—and after this came vertigo." Alas, *La Regenta*, 606.
42. Russell Berman has described this solitary Chinese figure as the repressed remains of the Romantic past. Innstetten is drawn to the ghost because his love for Effi's mother was also repressed, and the Chinese servants' own love story came to a similar end when his beloved married someone else. Innstetten's inability or unwillingness to deny the existence of the ghost is indicative of his inability to come to terms with his own past, which is thus made to come between him and Effi, and is ultimately the cause of his inability to forgive. See Russell A. Berman, "Effi Briest and the End of Realism," in *A Companion to German Realism*, ed. Todd Kontje (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 339-63.
43. In contrast to *La Regenta*, the reader cannot side, or will have great difficulty siding, with the oppressors of Effi since they are not offered as a perspective of focalization. Many empirical readers seem to have identified with Effi, which, however, implies filling a gap since her perspective is not given. Again, *La Regenta* is different since

we do get, from time to time, insights into Ana's mind, though insights that prove to be disappointing because of her shallowness.

44. See also Laura Hinton, *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from "Clarissa" to "Rescue 911"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).
45. This division of a character would complicate Iser's concept of the Leerstelle ("empty space"); see Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Fink, 1976), 302. While Effi's identity could well be described as an empty space in Iser's sense of the term, at the same time the positing of an identity is staged as an act of violence that implicates the reader.
46. Andreas Kablitz, "Realism as a Poetics of Observation: The Function of Narrative Perspective in the Classic French Novel: Flaubert—Stendhal—Balzac," in *What Is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*, ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 99-136.
47. In the case of *La Regenta*, James Mandrell describes how her objectification changes from the enigma of the woman whom no one can understand ("who knows?"), to a conscious suppression ("who cares?"). See James Mandrell, "Malevolent insemination: Don Juan Tenorio in *La Regenta*," in "Malevolent Inseminations" and Other Essays on Clarín, ed. Noel Valis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 1-28.

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